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For Immediate Release
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Lewistown, MT----The Bureau of Land Management's Lewistown Field Office (BLM) will delay the release of the draft resource management plan (RMP) for the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument for at least 9 months to include an analysis of 12 existing natural gas leases within the monument.

Originally, the BLM had planned to have the draft available for distribution and public comment this summer.

The BLM's decision to examine these leases is the result of a recent Montana Federal District Court ruling involving a suit that alleged the agency did not fully comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act when it awarded three of these leases in 1999.

The BLM's decision to award these three leases was based on analysis in the West HiLine RMP (1988). The BLM felt that document was adequate when the leasing decisions were made in 1999. However, in light of the court's ruling, the agency now believes all 12 of the leases (the three mentioned in the suit plus nine others) within the monument and based on the West HiLine should be analyzed in the RMP.

Eleven of these 12 natural gas leases are located in south Blaine County; one is located in southern Chouteau County.

"We want to address the court's concerns as quickly, completely and efficiently as possible. Bringing the additional leasing analysis into our ongoing RMP seems our most timely option and will save taxpayer dollars rather than starting another planning effort. Our first step will be to involve the public in this process," offered Gary Slagel, the BLM's monument manager in Lewistown.

(more)

The BLM will soon host public meetings in Lewistown, Winifred, Chinook, Great Falls, Fort Belknap and Billings. “We’ll examine the areas covered by these 12 natural gas leases to help create a range of alternatives for determining the resource stipulations necessary to protect the values for which this monument was designated,” Slagel said.

“We’ll be contacting the public through our mail lists (about 6,000 individuals, organizations and agencies) and regional media when we have the details worked out for these meetings,” Slagel added.

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